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Date: March 2, 2011

To: Planning and Development Committee

RE: **Support HB5477 AN ACT AUTHORIZING MUNICIPALITIES TO FORM AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONS.**

Prior legislation, such as that in Sec. 7-131a, enabling Conservation Commissions, has provided a model for non-regulatory, advisory, town commissions.

Like the environment, agriculture is worth protecting. It is labor intensive and produces in-state jobs, lowering unemployment and reducing the carbon footprint produced by long, out of state, commutes. Agriculture makes us more secure because CT Grown food is protected against centralized food product contamination by terrorists and imported products from countries with poor regulation. Agriculture preserves large quantities of open space and wild-life habitats, without requiring monies for its purchase, and keeps land on town grand lists thereby providing tax revenue. Agriculture is a three billion dollar, capital intensive industry in CT and supports many other businesses including, but not limited to, both heavy and light equipment suppliers, truck and automotive dealers, suppliers of shell fish vessels and equipment, green house and nursery equipment suppliers, construction companies, fencing companies, bedding, seed, lime, and fertilizer producers and retailers, and veterinarians.

If towns adopt this legislation and form Agricultural Commissions, it will enable them to provide information to local farmers and to town boards and commissions with regard to supporting a balance between agriculture, land preservation and other lands uses, as well as identify sources of grant monies for farmers and municipalities. It will enable towns to educate town government about agricultural laws and safety issues, enable a common understanding of farming among all town departments, and provide information and guidance on agriculture-related zoning issues, as well as support local, regional, and state vocational agriculture education programs. It will give towns a recognized body to serve in an advisory and/or conflict resolution capacity to residents, established town commissions, committees, and departments. And finally it will provide a facility to identify innovative opportunities for farming as well as create a climate that supports the economic viability of farming as a career in the municipality.

Sincerely,

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